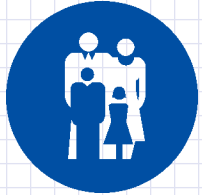


7.0 - A City that Enriches Our Lives

7.1 - Introduction



The quality of life in Grand Rapids plays an important role in determining

whether people will choose to live, shop, work and spend leisure time in the city. Many factors influence quality of life including schools, environmental quality, open space and recreation and the attractiveness of the built environment. The Master Plan focuses on the Grand River, open space, the city's heritage and urban design as important quality of life considerations.





What Makes a Healthy City?

The citizens of Grand Rapids expressed the following beliefs concerning what makes a quality living environment.

- Neighborhood parks and open space contribute to healthy neighborhoods.
- We should preserve, enhance and add to green space in the city.
- Neighborhoods need community/recreation centers for classes, meetings and other activities.
- Trails and bikeways should interconnect with our city parks.
- Tree lined streets contribute to healthy neighborhoods.
- Green spaces along our rivers and streams should be expanded to help protect and enhance water quality.
- Public places should become neighborhood landmarks.
- Community gardens should be developed.

The ability to attract and retain residents and a skilled workforce is increasingly tied to a community's quality of life - including its recreational and open space opportunities, its environmental quality, its schools and the quality of its built environment. The Master Plan recognizes the importance of these quality of life characteristics and gives special attention to creating an open space and trail network tied to expanded open space and mixed-use opportunities along the Grand River.



More than 2,500 people participated in the Master Plan process.

7.2 - Visions

One of the first steps of the master plan process was to ask the citizens of Grand Rapids what they would like to see the city look like twenty years from now. At the first community forum more than 300 people came together to discuss the future of Grand Rapids. Their discussion was guided by the information gathered during a series of neighborhood and business association meetings and discussion guide responses collected in the first two months of the planning process. Eleven major categories summarized key issues and provided participants a variety of discussion topics from which to choose. The beliefs and issues used at the forum were developed from the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified previously. Statements and images that described a vision, or preferred future, for Grand Rapids were then created by forum participants in small groups. The following visions emerged.

7.2.1 - Building On Our Assets

Grand Rapids will be a city where green spaces are valued, protected and preserved to enhance neighborhoods, provide community gathering places and sustain the invaluable treasure of wildlife and nature. We will succeed in making our most important natural feature - the Grand River - increasingly visible and usable by converting older riverfront industrial sites to parks and new development that welcomes people to the river's edge. We will recreate the rapids in the river as a reminder of our heritage.

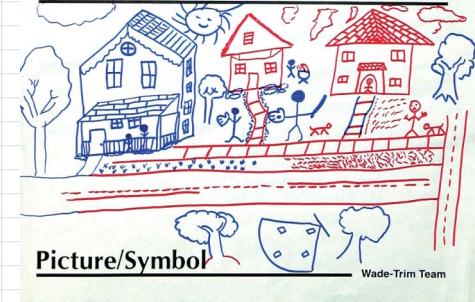


Topic: Great Older Neighborhoods

Issue: CRIME & DRUG ACTIVITY

A Pleasant small town concept in the city; where the streets are safe and accessible, children are able to play outside without fear or harassment. The neighbors are able to enjoy their communities day or night.

Vision Statement



Posters are from the first Master Plan Community Forum held at Central High School in March 2001.



We see that

We maintain, safe, open spaces and community centers.
with lots of supervised activities for children all ages.
They can participate in various activities including but not limited
to art music, computer lab, sport with their friends, parents and peers.

Vision Statement



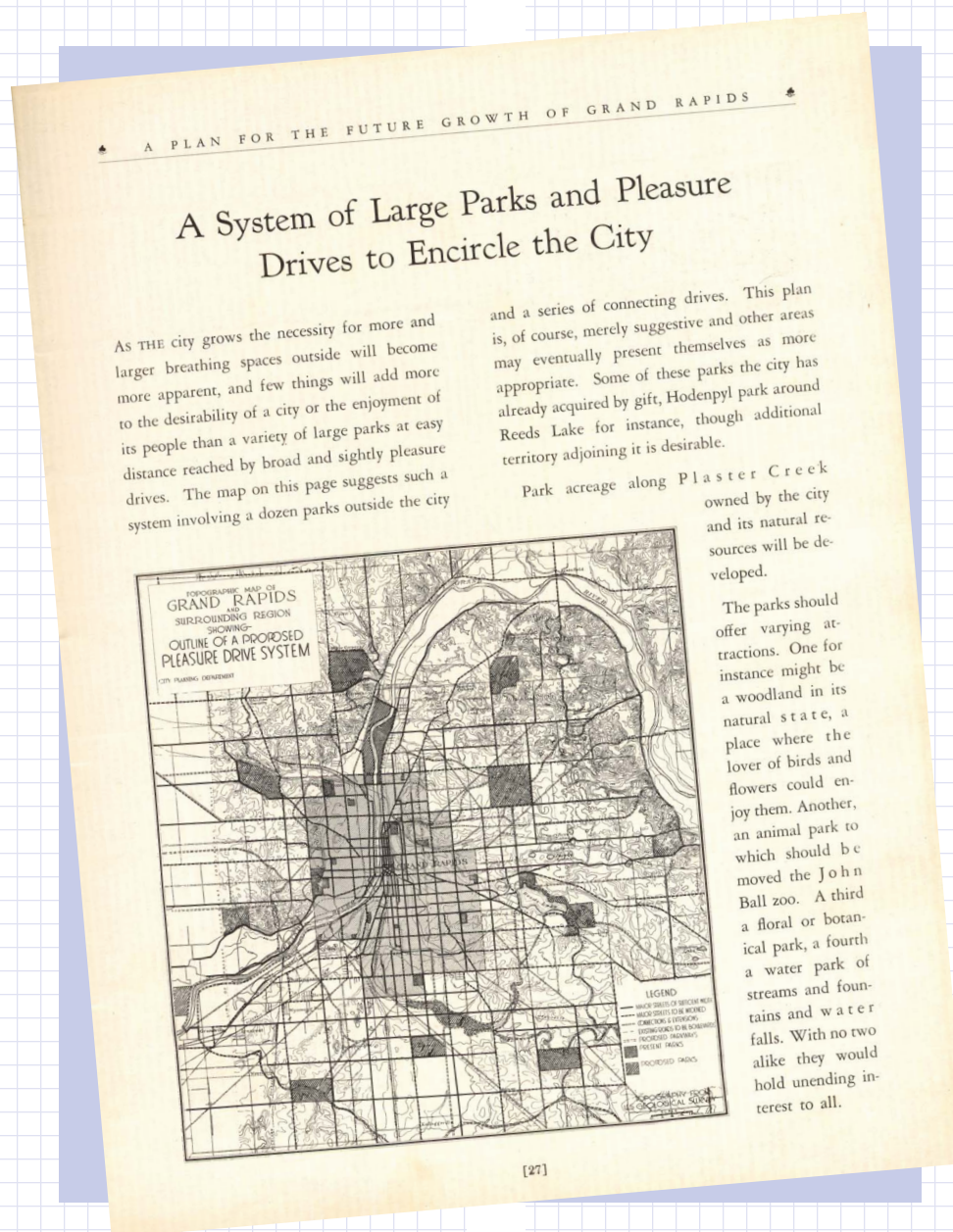
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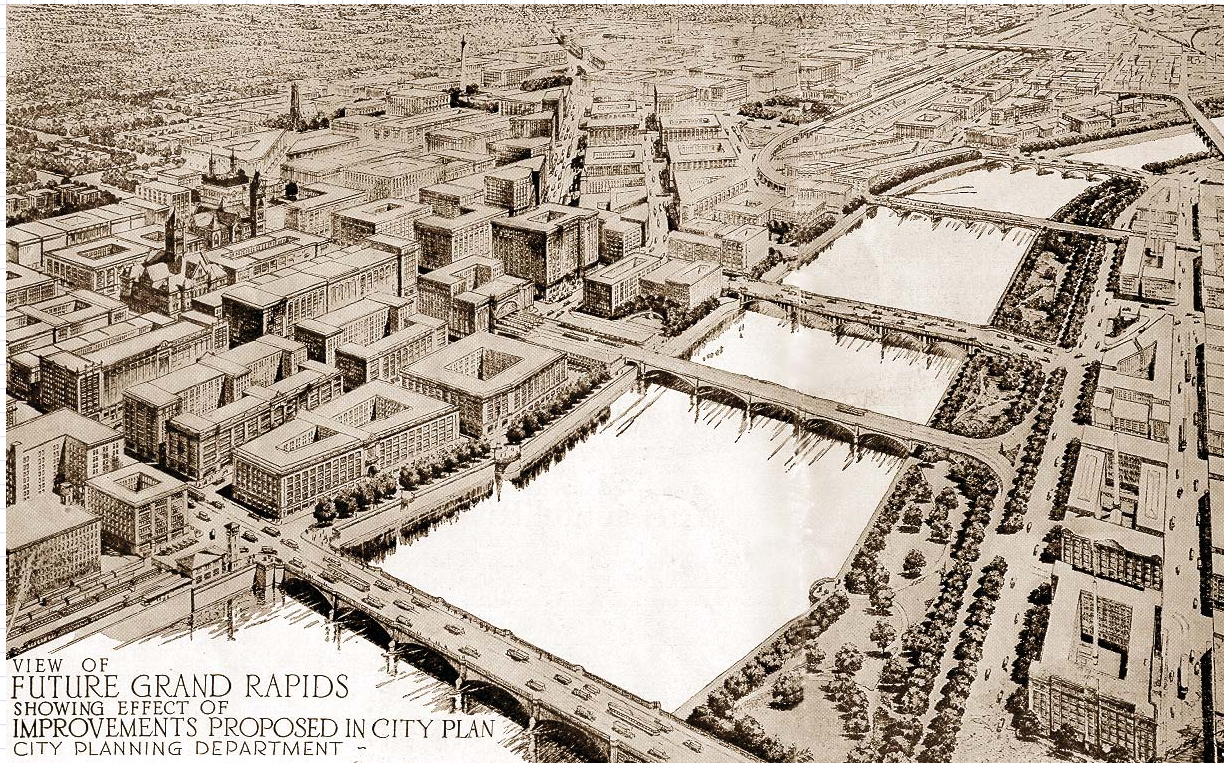
Wade-Trim Team

7.2.2 - Parks and Recreation

Grand Rapids will have safe parks and community centers with lots of supervised activities for children of all ages – from sports to the arts. Our success in engaging youth and families in our diverse recreational programs will strengthen our community and provide opportunities for young people to chart a constructive life course. We will also make great progress in developing a system of greenway corridors that link neighborhoods to parks, to one another and to regional and state trail systems.

The 1923 Master Plan Recognized the Importance of Parks and Open Space.





Drawing from City of Grand Rapids Master Plan, 1923.

7.3 - Plan Recommendations

To provide a basis for achieving these visions, plan recommendations focus on:

- capitalizing on the Grand River as one of the city's greatest assets;
- expanding green space and recreational opportunities; and
- quality urban design.

¹ On the west bank of the Grand River south of Wealthy Street, planning is underway for the development of a park on the Butterworth Landfill. This new riverfront park will link to Kent County's planned Millennium Park located directly to the south on the Grand River and Kent Trails. On the east bank of the Grand River, the Master Plan proposes that the river edge (west of Market Street) become part of the continuous riverfront open space/trail system.

7.3.1 - The Grand River

As Grand Rapids' most significant natural asset, the Grand River can and should play an increasingly important role in enhancing the city's quality of life. This can be achieved by continuing to expand the visibility of the river and improving access to and along its edges. Today, industrial development and highways limit the extent to which people can see, access and enjoy the riverfront. A new land use pattern that encourages open space and mixed-use development is needed to create a variety of people-oriented destinations. Existing riverwalk segments should also be extended along the entire length of the Grand River with connectors to neighborhoods across the city.

These ideas are not new; they build on the city's 1923 *Master Plan*, *Grand River Edges Plan* and *Central Area River Land Policy* recommendations formulated in the 1980's. The Master Plan expands on these ideas to reflect a broader vision for making the Grand River the focus of a larger open space system.

Mixed-Use

As shown in the *Future Land Use Map* (Figure 2.a - Page 21), the Master Plan recommends that a change in land use be encouraged along the riverfront north of Wealthy Street¹ from industry to open space and mixed-use. In the area north of I-196, east of US-131 (on the west side) and west of Monroe Avenue (on the east side), this mix of uses should give priority to:

- the addition of open space available to area residents, patrons, employees and the public;
- continuous public access along the river edge;
- medium- and high-density residential development on the riverfront.

New job-generating uses along the riverfront could include offices, educational or cultural uses and hotels. Retail, restaurant and/or entertainment can also



be encouraged as accessory uses located in the same building as a primary residential, office or hotel use. A mix of uses within a single building or development parcel should be encouraged. Development densities that capitalize on the value of a riverfront location, and careful control of surface parking, are recommended.

Light industrial uses may also be appropriate in certain locations and under certain conditions. On the east side of the river, existing light industrial uses may remain and/or existing light industrial buildings may be reused for non-polluting, job-generating activities, including office use. Because of the narrow dimensions of this riverfront zone, the expansion of existing industrial uses should require special approval and new industrial development should be discouraged. However, new and expanded light industrial use can be an appropriate component of the mixed-use area located to the east of Monroe Avenue.

On the west bank of the river, more complete redevelopment is anticipated in the riverfront zone to the east of US-131. The expanded mix of uses here could include new light industry. Nevertheless, this light industrial development should require special approval and, as noted above, medium- and high-density housing and open space should be given priority on the river edge.

Encouraging a new mix of uses in industrial areas on the riverfront (and near Downtown) is an important strategy in creating a human-scale, walkable and transit-supportive city. To be successful, these mixed-use areas must be carefully planned and designed to provide incremental transitions in use intensity and building scale, coherence in architectural design and a pedestrian-friendly public realm. Performance standards are also needed to control impacts (for example, noise and truck traffic) that can reduce the quality of life. In this riverfront zone, additional standards that protect the river's water quality, habitat value and flood control functions are also appropriate.

Figure 7.a - Examples of Riverfront Mixed-Use and Greenspace Design

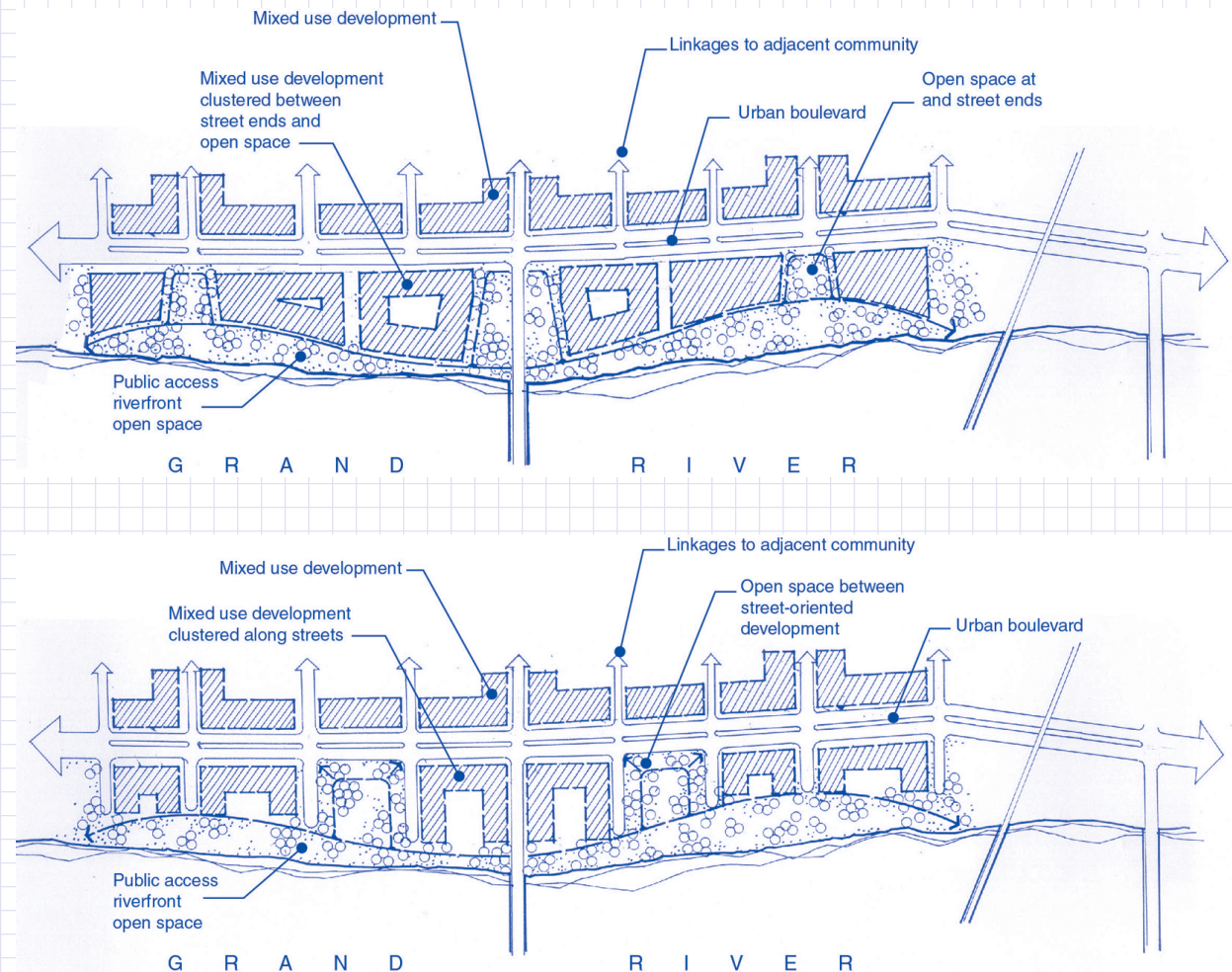
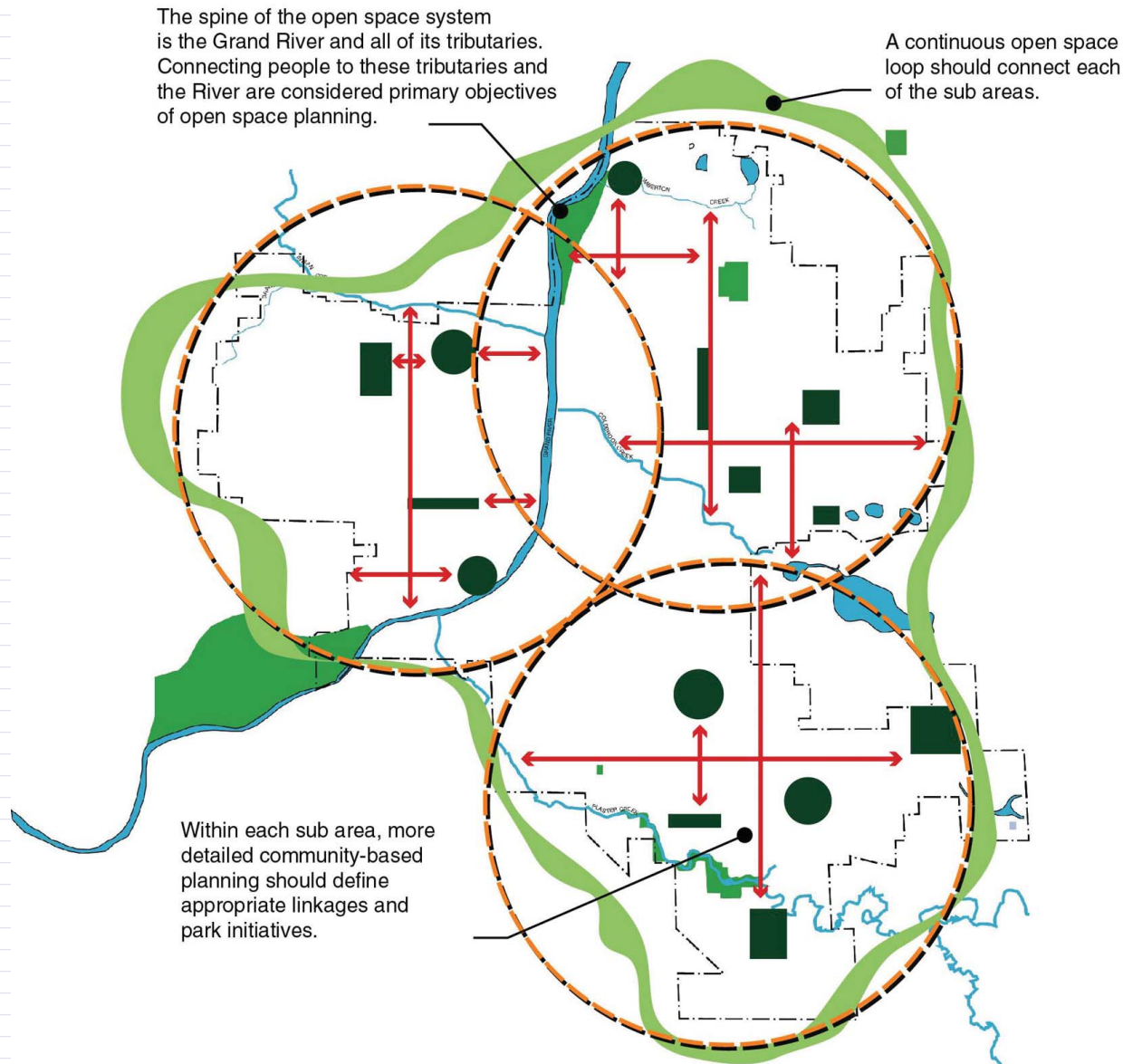


Figure 7.b -Greenway Connections



Recommended Development Objectives for All Mixed-Use Areas are presented in Figure 3.g - Page 37. Descriptions of the Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas are presented in Figure 3.h - Page 38 (see Mixed-Use Area Type B). In addition, two examples of how plan recommendations and guidelines might be applied on the riverfront (on the Near West Side and in the vicinity of Plainfield and Leonard) are provided in Figure 7.a - Examples of Riverfront Mixed-Use and Greenspace Design - Page 93 and Supplement B.

These Master Plan materials provide a starting point for undertaking more detailed area-specific plans for each proposed mixed-use area. These area-specific plans should determine where existing development should be protected and enhanced and where future redevelopment should be encouraged. These more detailed planning efforts, undertaken with the collaboration of the city, area land owners, developers, residents and business owners, are essential in establishing a foundation for successful mixed-use development (see Chapter 11 - Area-Specific Plans - Page 151).

River Connections

The Master Plan endorses the recommendation originally proposed in the *Grand River Edges* plan that a continuous riverfront walkway be created on both sides of the Grand River to connect the proposed Millennium Park (on the south) to Riverside Park (on the north). In addition, the Master Plan recommends that connections between inland neighborhoods and the riverfront be improved. As described in the preceding chapter (*Balanced Transportation*), West Side neighborhoods could be reconnected to the river by altering the profile of US-131, improving existing pedestrian tunnels, and/or creating new underpasses to allow streets to be extended to the riverfront.

Less dramatic but equally important changes are recommended on other portions of the river to improve its accessibility from inland neighborhoods.

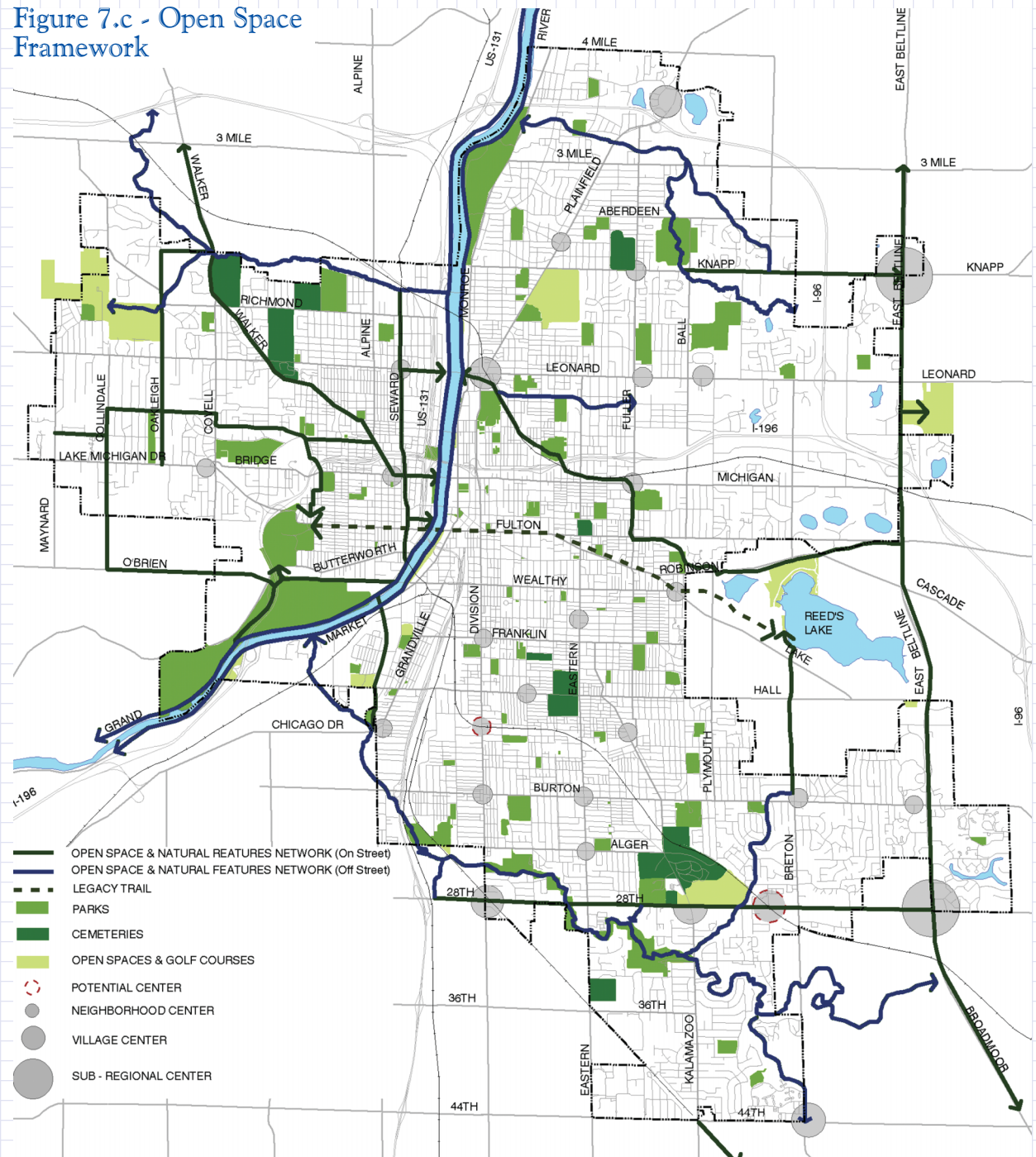
These include the creation of additional public open spaces at the riverfront termini of selected east-west streets and at bridge crossings, as well as improved sidewalks, street tree plantings and bike lanes on selected streets leading to the river. As noted above, *Supplement B* presents two examples that illustrate how decisions on land use, development character and streetscape investments can help to enhance connections to the river from inland neighborhoods.

Primary Open Space Framework

To increase the value of the Grand River to all city neighborhoods, the Master Plan recommends establishing a primary open space framework that links the river to a network of greenways (off street) and an on-street system of designated pedestrian and bicycle connections (Figure 7.b - Greenway Connections Map - Page 94 and Figure 7.c - Open Space Framework Plan Map - Page 95). The framework's greenway components follow (and in some instances, suggest day lighting) the river's tributary creeks to provide expanded recreational opportunities and improved walk/bike links. Just as importantly, the greenways can provide opportunities for creating habitat corridors and detaining and/or filtering stormwater runoff to improve water quality and reduce flood risk.

The riverwalk and greenway components of the primary open space framework are complemented by on-street pedestrian and bicycle connections that link major destinations within the city and provide connections to existing and proposed regional trails at the city's edges. In addition, a Legacy Trail is proposed along Fulton Street, Lake Drive and Wealthy Street to connect John Ball Park to Reeds Lake/John Collins Park in East Grand Rapids. This Legacy Trail, which follows a former streetcar line, could be developed in a variety of ways (for example, streetscape improvements, historic interpretive displays, public art, antique trolley) to highlight the city's history.

Figure 7.c - Open Space Framework





People in Grand Rapids want to capitalize on the potential of parks and open spaces to improve neighborhood quality of life, bring residents together and build organizational capacity and pride.

7.3.2 - Parks and Open Space

The recommended primary open space framework establishes a starting point for more detailed planning of open space and pedestrian and bike connections within three sub-areas of the city (*Figure 7.b - Greenway Connections Map - Page 94*). The definition of this secondary open space framework should be undertaken in collaboration with neighborhood and business organizations and the Planning Department, as the Park and Recreation Department periodically updates its plans. In addition, the preparation of neighborhood and mixed-use area-specific plans, that build on the Master Plan's broader recommendations, is also anticipated. These area-specific plans will provide additional opportunities to coordinate more detailed planning for parks, open space and pedestrian and bicycle linkages with decisions on land use and development character.

People in Grand Rapids want to capitalize on the potential of parks and open spaces to improve neighborhood quality of life, bring residents together and build organizational capacity and pride. The reuse of vacant lots as community gardens, play areas or beautifully landscaped and maintained focal points provides an opportunity for residents to cooperate in creating a tangible improvement in the quality of life on their street or in their neighborhood. New and improved park spaces that create an attractive residential environment (for example, on the riverfront) or that are designed and programmed to draw people and activity (for example, in a mixed-use center core) can also enhance an area's appeal to private investors. In addition, parks and open spaces can enhance urban residents' understanding of, and appreciation for, natural systems and environmental stewardship.

Park and Recreation Master Plan

The city's *Park and Recreation Master Plan*, which is updated every five years, was updated in coordination with the preparation of this Master Plan. As a result, the goals and guidelines that constitute the action plan of the *Parks and Recreation Master Plan* are closely aligned with the visions, plan recommendations, objectives and policies presented here. In addition, the *Parks and Recreation Master Plan* evaluated the amount and distribution of park acreage throughout the city based on national standards. The findings of this analysis, presented in *Figure 7.d - Parks Deficits Map - Page 97*, provide a quick and general visual summary of park and open space deficiencies that need to be addressed.

Open Space Issues

During the preparation of the Master Plan, citizen input emphasized the need to provide additional green space, particularly within the densely developed central city. Three park and open space issues of particular importance were identified:

- the potential for road rights-of-way to serve as "green" corridors;
- the opportunity to coordinate open space and stormwater management planning; and
- the need to explore collaborative strategies for funding the development and maintenance of green spaces throughout the city.

Green Streets - The visual quality and walkability of the city's streets have a significant influence on Grand Rapids' image and quality of life. Street trees, located in a planting zone between the sidewalk and the curb, create a comfortable environment for people on foot by providing shade in warm weather and a buffer to moving vehicles. Street trees also create a sense of scale, soften the urban setting and establish a unified foreground. Boulevarde streets

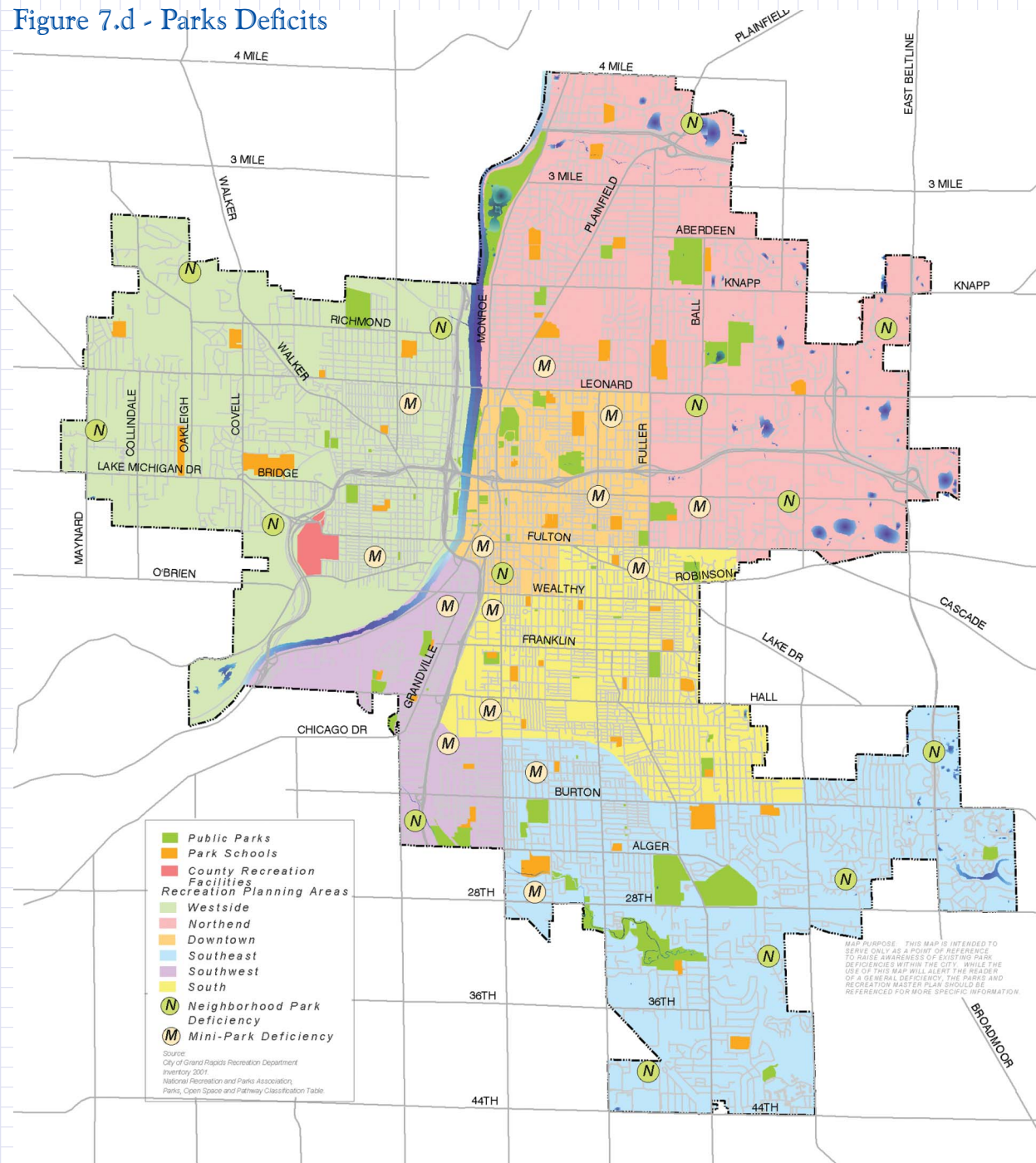
(with a landscaped median) can have an even more dramatic effect in greening the urban environment.

More substantial streetscape investments are likely to be appropriate on high image streets that serve as gateway corridors to the city (see *Chapter 6 - Balanced Transportation - Page 75*) and on streets that are components of the primary open space framework. Nevertheless, the planting and maintenance of street trees should be a priority on all city streets.

Stormwater Management - Natural infiltration (or percolation into the soil) is a more environmentally sustainable approach to managing the quantity and quality of stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces than directing it to catch basins and pipes that carry it to streams and rivers. But natural infiltration requires land - for landscaped swales that slow and filter runoff and for wetlands, ponds or detention basins - that can store runoff for later, controlled release. The Master Plan recommends that opportunities for retrofitting existing parks to help provide for stormwater management and natural infiltration be explored and that the acquisition and design of new parks consider potential stormwater management functions.

In addition, as illustrated in *Figure 7.c - Open Space Framework Map - Page 95*, the Master Plan recommends creating a system of greenways along tributary streams to the Grand River. These greenways should include naturalized open channels that slow the velocity of the runoff they carry and bring that flow into contact with soil, vegetation, air and sunlight to allow the natural ecosystem to treat and infiltrate stormwater. Finally existing, publicly owned stormwater detention basins in the city should be redesigned to provide infiltration areas and/or created wetlands that enhance their stormwater management capability. These detention areas should also be landscaped to make them visual assets year around; informal recreation could also be allowed on some portions of these sites during the periods when they

Figure 7.d - Parks Deficits





**Figure 7.e - 2003-2007
Parks and Recreation
Master Plan Goals**

Goals

- Provide the resources for the maintenance, renovation and development of a high quality park and recreation system that meets the needs of the Grand Rapids community.
- Strive to develop public green space within the city that is safe and attractive and serves as gathering places and destination venues.
- Continue to involve the community, neighborhoods and residents in the development of policies, design improvements, acquisition and implementation of parks and open space.
- Recognize the quality of life issues that will benefit from developing an open space system that relies on the ability to move around the city by foot, bike, etc.

- Provide park and recreation facilities and programs that are accessible to people of all ages, incomes and abilities.
- Provide parks, recreation and special event facilities that meet the community's recreational needs, conserve natural resources and/or enhance access to the Grand River.
- Increase internal and external awareness and support for the department.
- Employ an informed and trained staff to carry out the mission, goals and objectives of the department and provide an environment fostering personal and professional growth.
- Recognize and understand the significant role that open space and recreation play in the stabilization and revitalization of neighborhoods.

Selected Guidelines

Community Enrichment

- Improve and sustain quality of life by providing and coordinating services in neighborhoods.
- Provide historical, cultural and environmental interpretation whenever possible to further enhance the recreation system and the community's exposure and understanding of these elements.

Diversity

- Intensify the promotion of and participation in ethnic festivals.
- Ensure inclusiveness in all departmental programs, services, activities and facilities by continuing efforts to make all parks and programs accessible to people of all abilities.

Collaboration

- Continue to work closely with the public school district in the provision of recreation opportunities and understanding the effects and ramifications of recent and planned school closings.

- Work closely with the various neighborhood and business associations in the provision, improvement and maintenance of public spaces.

Connectivity

- Increase walkability within the community to assist the city's goal to provide balanced transportation opportunities.
- Develop a connected greenway system that protects natural features; provides habitat corridors; connects neighborhoods, parks and open space and links to regional and state trail systems.

Grand River System

- Work with appropriate government agencies to provide a continuous trail system along the Grand River.
- The Grand River corridor should serve as the backbone and framework for the further development of a citywide non-motorized system.

Provision of Additional Green Space

- Develop policy and protocol with the assistance of the Planning Department and other applicable city staff in regard to vacant lots within residential neighborhoods.
- Evaluate underutilized green spaces such as existing stormwater retention facilities to provide useable open space that is aesthetically pleasing and multifunctional.

Facility Development

- Conduct a feasibility study for the provision of recreation centers within the city.
- Complete a conceptual master plan for the Butterworth Landfill.

Funding

- Aggressively pursue alternative funding sources for the provision of recreation facilities, programs and opportunities.



are not flooded (See *Chapter 8 - A City in Balance with Nature - Page 103*).

Resources for Acquisition, Development and Maintenance - City resources that can be devoted to the acquisition, development and maintenance of parks, greenways, trails and streetscapes are limited. As a result, creative strategies for providing the land and resources needed to achieve the Master Plan's recommendations must be explored. These might include:

- opportunities to partner with civic, neighborhood or special interest organizations to provide open space improvements, maintenance and programming (for example, adopt-a-park or -street programs; community gardens; playground development);
- soliciting the donation of land and/or easements;
- partnering with the school district and other organizations to assist in the provision of land and facilities, particularly indoor recreation opportunities.

Opportunities may also exist for rethinking development regulations to shift some of the responsibility for providing, developing and maintaining open space improvements to the private sector. Examples might include:

- including requirements for usable, accessible public spaces in zoning regulations and allowing payments in lieu of providing those open spaces;
- tree preservation, replacement and or planting requirements for new development (and payments in lieu);
- requiring minimum landscape setbacks from rivers and streams; and
- encouraging the use of native plants/landscaping.

7.3.3 - Urban Design

In Grand Rapids, people are concerned about the loss of architecturally and historically significant buildings and the quality and character of new development. To help address these concerns, sample development guidelines have been prepared as part of the Master Plan to illustrate how the community can be more proactive in describing the urban design objectives it wants to achieve and the factors that will be considered in reviewing and approving projects. These guidelines are presented in *Chapter 10 - Development Character - Page 117* and address the topics below.

Mixed-Use - how to maximize the compatibility between different uses, densities and building types. Four situations are addressed in the context of the city's older neighborhoods:

- infill development and parking in a traditional business district;
- institutional mixed-use;
- industrial mixed-use; and
- reuse of a school site.

In addition, guidelines are recommended for improving the visual quality and walkability of auto-oriented strip commercial development.

Higher Quality, Higher Density Residential Development - how to encourage medium- and high-density residential development that is located and designed to complement existing patterns.

Green Space in the Central City - how to provide more green space in densely developed areas.

Chapter 10 - Development Character - Page 117 also presents a preliminary evaluation of the characteristics that distinguish five different types of neighborhoods in Grand Rapids as the starting point for developing

additional guidelines to ensure that valued characteristics of the each neighborhood's existing development context are preserved as new development, infill and rehabilitation are undertaken.



In Grand Rapids, people are concerned about the loss of architecturally and historically significant buildings and the quality and character of new development.





Photo courtesy of ArtWorks Expanded Visions 2001 youth apprenticeship program.

7.4 - Objectives and Policies

The following objectives and policies summarize what needs to be done to achieve the vision and plan recommendations presented on the preceding pages so that Grand Rapids can protect and capitalize on its natural and built assets. Above each objective is a line of theme icons. Highlighted icons illustrate how a particular objective is interrelated with another Master Plan theme. See Page 24 for a description of each theme.



Objective EOL 1

Make the Grand River a recreational, aesthetic, economic and historic focus of the city.

- Encourage a change in land use north of Wealthy Street from industry to open space and mixed-use (see Figure 2.a - Future Land Use Map - Page 21, Figure 3.g - Development Objectives for All Mixed-Use Areas - Page 37 and Figure 3.h - Purpose, Recommended Uses and Special Considerations for Mixed-Use Areas: Type B - Page 38).
- Pursue the planning and development of a city park on the former Butterworth Landfill; link this new park to the county's proposed Millennium Park.
- Extend the riverwalk system from Riverside Park to the proposed Millennium Park; include a riverwalk connection on the east bank of the Grand River located west of Market Street in the area south of Downtown (see Figure 7.c - Open Space Framework Plan Map - Page 95).
- Evaluate the feasibility of returning the rapids to the Grand River.
- Improve connections between Near West Side neighborhoods and the river by evaluating the long-term feasibility of eliminating the US-131 embankment; make interim improvements to enhance pedestrian, bike and vehicular access under the embankment.
- Provide open spaces at the riverfront termini of selected east-west streets and at bridge crossings; provide coordinated pedestrian and bike improvements on these streets.



Objective EOL 2

Promote the development of a system of greenways along tributary streams to the Grand River, as well as on-street pedestrian and bicycle corridors, to link all city neighborhoods to the river, major destinations and regional trail systems.

(Figure 7.c - Open Space Framework Plan Map - Page 95.)

- Design greenways to protect natural features, provide habitat corridors and improve stormwater management, as well as providing bicycle and pedestrian connections.
- Provide streetscape, pedestrian and bicycle improvements on the on-street elements of the proposed primary open space system.
- Explore the potential for creating a Legacy Trail on Fulton Street/Lake Drive/Wealthy Street, connecting John Ball Park to John Collins Park.
- Continue to cooperate in the planning and development of a regional park system.



Objective EOL 3

Expand open space and recreational opportunities.

- Build on the proposed primary open space framework to undertake the more detailed planning of open spaces, parks and pedestrian/bicycle links in collaboration with neighborhood and business organizations.

- b. Support the acquisition and development of new parks and open space, giving special consideration to areas of the city with acreage and distribution deficits.
- c. Maintain existing parks and open spaces in a safe, clean and attractive condition.
- d. Continue to cooperate with the public schools to provide joint park-school facilities. Update the park-school agreement to address school closure issues and maintain public access.
- e. Maintain public land that is vacant in a park-like condition or make these sites available as community gardens.
- f. Design parks to optimize usability in response to community/neighborhood needs and preferences.
- g. Include natural areas, wildlife habitat, native landscapes, stormwater management and environmental education in park planning and programming.
- h. Support expanded recreational programming for residents of all ages.
- i. Encourage multiple use of public buildings for community activities.
- j. Develop and operate recreation centers in different areas of the city.
- k. Capitalize on the potential of city streets to serve as green corridors.



Objective EOL 4

Identify additional/alternative strategies for funding the acquisition, development and maintenance of parks and open spaces throughout the city.

- a. Investigate the potential for partnerships with civic, neighborhood and special interest organizations.
- b. Revise development regulations to provide requirements and/or incentives for private sector provision of useable, public open spaces.
- c. Continue to aggressively pursue state and federal funding.



Objective EOL 5

Build on our past.

- a. Make city history and historic preservation important values in land use and development decisions.
- b. Provide technical and support staff to identify districts with historic and architectural value and work with area property owners to assist in their designation to capture the benefit of historic tax credits.
- c. Encourage the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic and architecturally valuable structures.



Objective EOL 6

Emphasize urban design quality and place-making.

- a. Document and establish consensus on valued visual and spatial characteristics within the community; develop strategies and tools, including urban design guidelines, for protecting those characteristics and encouraging compatibility in new development and rehabilitation projects.
- b. Protect and capitalize on important scenic views, landmarks and entrances to the city.
- c. Encourage the creation of spaces for informal social interaction in the design of private development and the public realm.



Objective EOL 7

Recognize the arts as an essential resource to be nurtured and supported.



